



This document presents actual accounts of two lessons in a classroom of eight- and nine-year-olds. They illustrate ways in which literature can be used to extend children's creative abilities.

Drama

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Story dramatization (enacting) and improvisation (invention) are basically the same thing. The important distinction is the treatment of the story—whether it is used as a *road map* for the children to follow or as a *springboard* for their own inventions.

When stories are the source for work in drama, the teacher may choose to deal with the story line, the characters, the ideas, or the concepts suggested by the narrative.

With younger or less experienced children, it is helpful to use the story as a framework that the children can amplify with details of movement and speech. They need not act out the whole story in sequence; they may probe the story's potential until it has been explored and extended. This technique usually results in much experimentation and rotating of roles as the children bring interesting story *moments* to life. The security of working with familiar storybook characters and situations is an added benefit.

When children have gained experience in this kind of work, they can begin to work from their own frameworks. The story is still important as a source for ideas, but the children use it

to develop their own characters, relationships, circumstances, and situations.

At times each individual will work alone in his or her own space, at other times with a partner, in a small group, or with the whole class, but always without fear of competition, typecasting, or the demands of performance.

A wide range of activities is possible, even for the handicapped child. Some children find talking with a partner difficult, working in a group impossible, and yet derive much benefit from the discussion before, during, and after the mutual experience of drama. Children who are standing doing nothing or hiding under a desk should not be forced to enter the activity. When they feel secure, they will enter willingly. Children must also feel free to withdraw if they are having difficulty coping. If such withdrawal is widespread, the activity should be altered immediately. At all times the teacher will have to keep observing, analysing, and assessing what is taking place in order to match the activities to the abilities of the children, expanding their imaginations, praising them for achievements, and recognizing individual differences.





Under such circumstances, all children benefit from drama or the extension of stories through movement and speech activities, through a quiet talk with a friend, or through the playing out of feelings and emotions.

Children not only deepen their appreciation of literature, but add much to their understanding of themselves and others.

In the following case studies, the sources for enacting and inventing will be stories familiar and less familiar. The emphasis will be on involving all the children in the exploration of mood and movement, body and space, talk and silence, and effect, story and laughter, character and moment.



These examples are actual accounts of two lessons in a classroom of eight- and nine-year-olds.

Case Study 1:

The children sit scattered about the room. Nothing has been read to them so far.

The teacher begins:

Make yourself as small as you can. Make yourself as large as you can. Fill as much space as possible. Make yourself smaller than ever now. Make yourself even bigger than before.

The activity moves along quickly, at a pace that allows the children little time to be concerned with anything but their own activity.

The teacher continues:

Make yourself very small again. When you hear the rattle of my tambourine, grow very slowly into something quite large—then freeze the position.

Several children leap to their feet in seconds. The teacher works quietly, speaks slowly, and guides the children through the activity again. Eventually, quiet, slow recorded music is introduced to help the children control their movement.

The children are now motionless. The room is filled with statues of bigness.

Look at the way you are holding yourself. What might you be? Whisper your ideas in my ear as I pass by.

In the early stages of the activity most of the children use space vertically. The teacher continually challenges them to think of other ways to fill the space around them. Some respond by spreading out on the floor; others snake from side to side; one boy tries to walk on his hands. It is interesting to note the efforts of the children, each trying to understand his or her body and the way it moves.

The children are clustered about the teacher now. They talk about bigness as they have represented it.

Was anyone a troll?

Do you know any stories that have trolls in them? Only Three Billy Goats Gruff is mentioned.

Tell me that story.

The children describe character, place, and action and blurt out quotes as the story unfolds in jumbled fashion.

Can you tell me the story with your whole body?

Find a partner and build with your bodies the bridge that the troll guarded. You and your partner join two others and make another bridge using all four bodies.

The work in fours is not successful. Some groups are waging tug of war. A bridge collapses in a heap. The teacher intervenes.

Find your own space again. While I count slowly to three, make a frozen picture of the troll who lives under the bridge you were building.

The teacher moves among the statues making comments of praise on the use of space.





When I strike my tambourine, move your troll about the room. Try to make him move in ways I've never seen before.

A trio of trolls turns on the group, obviously wanting to take on all challengers. The teacher positions himself in front of them screening them from the others. The tambourine clatters violently:

You trolls are all climbing a very treacherous mountain slope. Show me how difficult it is to pick your way along.

The clattering sound continues—a pace has been established. Trolls struggle up imaginary slopes. One child, who simulates a spectacular tumble, gets little response and starts climbing again.

The teacher has grouped the children in three's. They are creating frozen pictures of trolls guarding a bridge. The groups function well. The children are given only seconds to make their tableaux.

Make another picture now. This time make it show what happens when someone tries to cross the bridge.

The class creates the picture two or three times, switching roles and testing new ideas. The room is getting noisy but the groups are working well.

Find a partner quickly. One is X; the other is Y. Decide which is which. X is one of the goats; Y is the troll. What conversation do they have on the bridge? Try it.

Roles are rotated, the scene is replayed a few times but the activity lasts too long and concentration begins to break down. The tambourine sounds:

It's time to climb back down the mountain, trolls, but all that arguing has made you very tired. Move slowly, carefully.

Tired trolls slip and slither down imaginary slopes. When the bottom is reached they collapse exhausted and lie still.

The children sit around the teacher. They talk about the conversations on the bridge.

Do you remember what the big goat said to the troll in the story?

No one recalls the words exactly. The teacher reads the Marcia Brown version of the story. The language of the story is discussed. The children find it most appropriate. The teacher provides other versions by William Stobbs, Raymond Briggs, and Paul Galdone. Interest quickly switches to what the trolls look like. The children compare the pictures in the different editions.

The teacher reads *Terrible Troll* by Mercer Meyer. The children gasp at the thought of such an enormous troll. There is much interest in finding more troll stories but for the moment there are paint, paper, and other materials at hand . . . "troll stuff".

Case Study 2:

The same group of children is involved in this activity. The children have listened to *D'Aulaire's Trolls* during the past few days. They have been asked to spread out.

*I'm going to play a piece of music for you. ("In the Hall of the Mountain King" from Grieg's *Peer Gynt* suite.) Close your eyes as you listen and think about the trolls we've read about. What kinds do you see? What are they doing?*

The children sit quietly, concentrating. The music fades under.

When you are ready, form a picture of the troll you are thinking of and have it do what the music suggests.

The music comes up. The children gradually stir and begin to take on troll shapes. The movement is much more controlled than the last time. Concentration is excellent. The music dies. The room is still. Thirty-two splendid trolls are rooted to the spot.

As I walk among you I can see mountain trolls and river trolls, but I am having difficulty finding troll hags and troll brats and many-headed trolls.



When the music starts, practise moving your troll.

The children are trying to use space effectively, but few are experimenting with specific physical features. The teacher asks:

What kinds of things would interfere with the movement of many trolls? There is much discussion about long noses, many heads, and cumbersome tails.

Together the children try moving with big noses, several heads. Someone suggests they roll some newspaper noses and hold them to their faces. Noses are rolled, the music plays, and movement

is started, but concentration is maintained with difficulty. Two children sword-fight with their noses in a corner. *Move into groups of three and move in and around each other. Watch each other's movements and don't bump.*

Some children discard their noses and try moving with a shoulderful of heads. Others retain their paper props. The teacher continually draws their attention to the movement and admonishes them to slow everything down.

Now that you have some idea about your troll shape and know how it's best for you to move, create a game with your group that you think trolls might play. Begin to play your game as soon as it is ready.



The groups respond with amazing speed. Games with imaginary balls and other equipment are soon under way. The teacher suggests that chants similar to those used with playground games be added. After a short time the teacher stops the activity.

As you know, trolls cannot tolerate sunlight. It destroys them, doesn't it? In a moment we'll return to your games. When you hear the gong you will suddenly realize that the sun is rising

and you are miles from your cave. As the sun climbs higher, what happens to you? Will you reach safety? Will you die? The music will tell you how bright and warm the sun is getting.

The games begin. A gong sounds. The music begins softly. A few children scramble quickly to the safety of corners and look around not knowing what to do. Some deliberately claw their way across the floor, showing loss of strength and simulating a desperate struggle to stay alive. The music increases in volume. One child, dazzled by imaginary sunlight, stumbles about in circular patterns, going nowhere. A few children slump lifeless to the floor. A girl tries to haul a friend behind her. One child who bolted quickly to safety re-enters the scene to rescue a friend and expires magnificently. The music soars, then dies. There is silence. The floor is littered with the stonelike remains of trolls. The teacher, obviously delighted, gathers the children round. They all talk at once excitedly about their story. Most want to do it again and add new ideas.

In the days to follow, much work related to the dramatization is undertaken. The fascination with troll hags results in the creation of papier-mâché noses moulded to eye masks. The recorded music is replaced by sound compositions created by groups of children for *The Night the Trolls Played Late*. Choral chants from troll games printed with magic markers on chart paper line the walls. Throughout all of this the school librarian has been very busy helping some of the children find books related to the experience for their personal reading and providing records such as *Siegfried* for small groups to listen to and discuss. A future session dealing with mythical creatures in literature is already in progress as material for further drama experience is being gathered by both librarian and children.

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